

Research Bulletin

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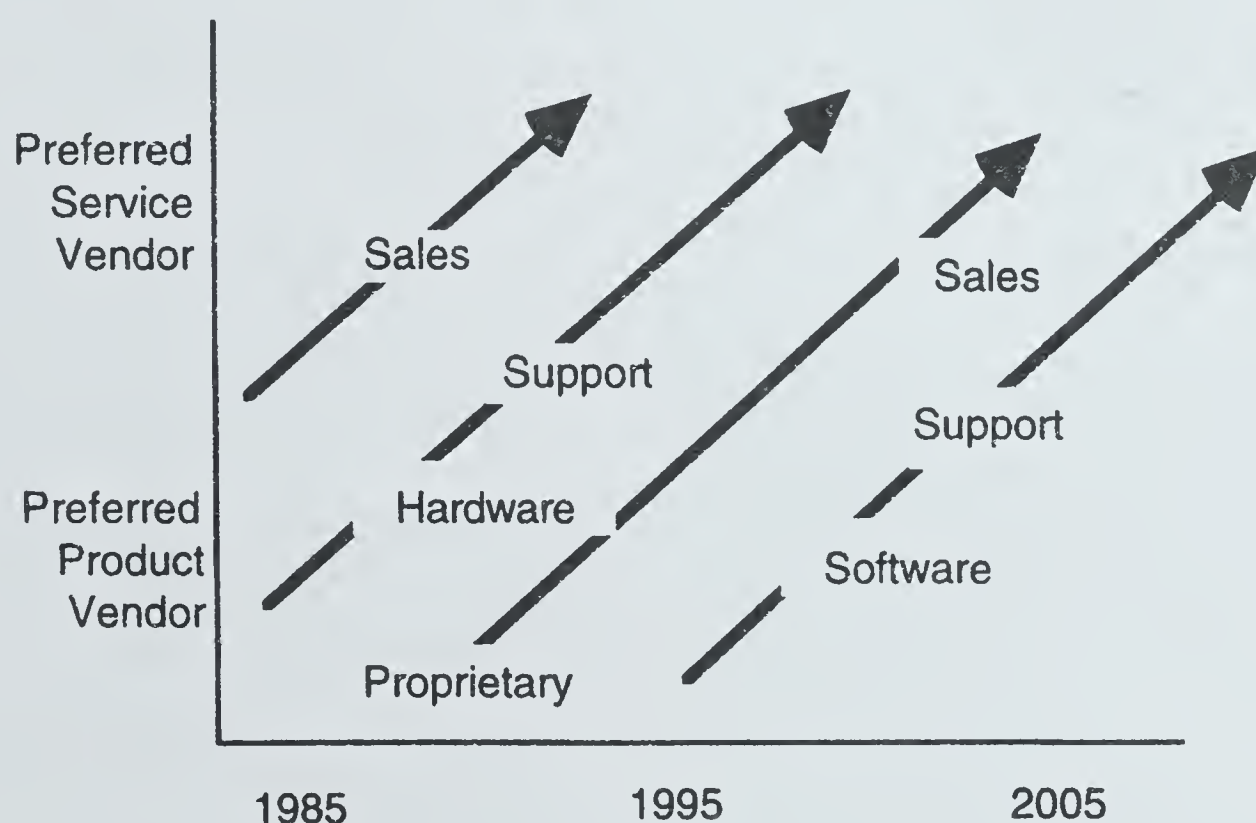
The Impact of Client/Server on User Support Needs

As the movement to client/server (C/S) computing accelerates, users are increasingly faced with new support challenges radically different from those appropriate to a centralised mainframe environment.

Supporting the relatively mature mainframe or medium system-centric systems has become a market characterised by cost control issues.
Exhibit 1

Cost reduction resulting from competitive open support providers is a route pioneered by hardware support organisations, and is now being followed by software support firms. Exhibit 1 illustrates this broad trend in support markets.

Software Support Enters the Open Market



Source: INPUT

In contrast, support for client/server computing is presenting completely new challenges to vendors.

INPUT research indicates three main user concerns:

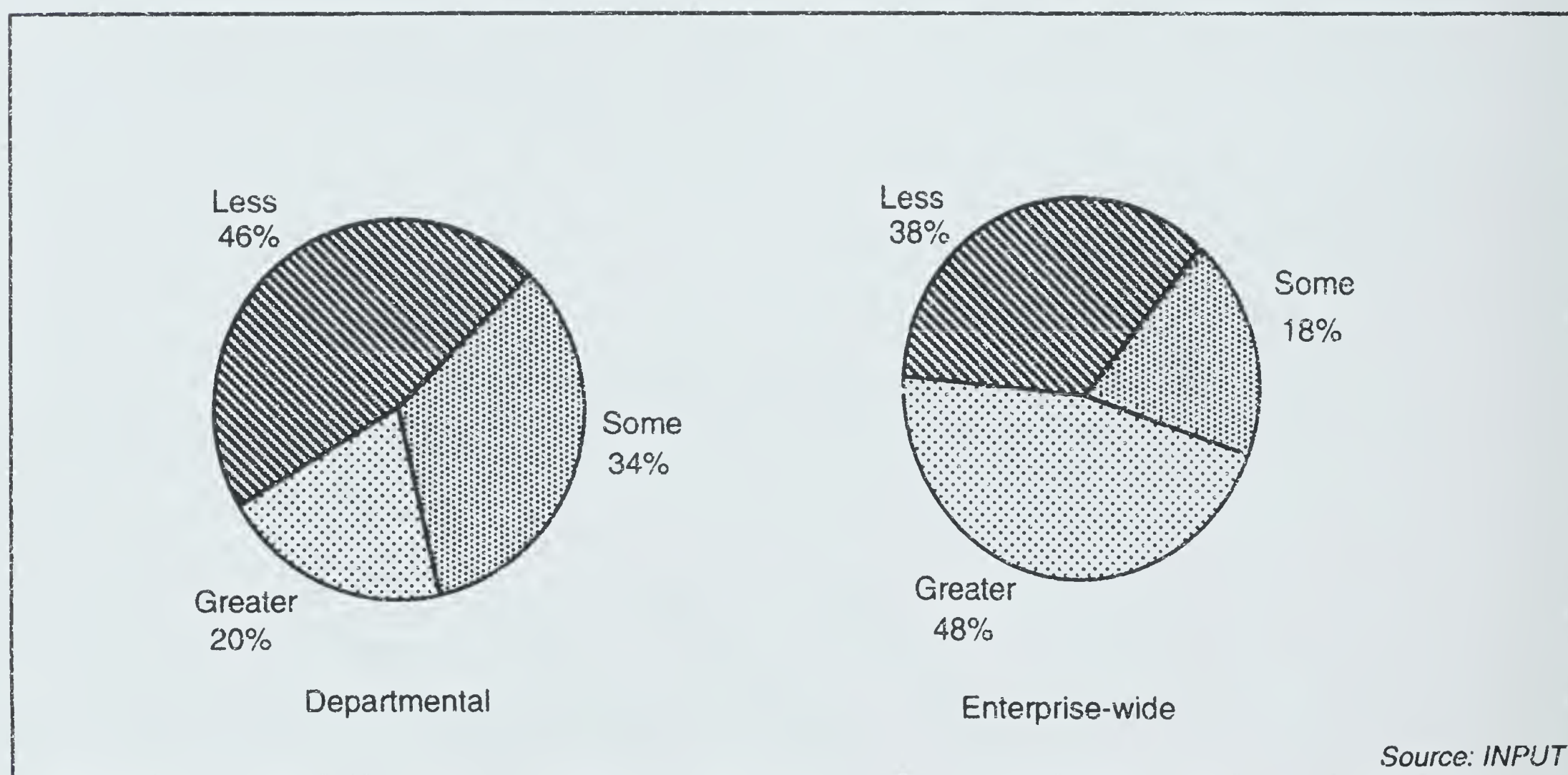
- The availability of support
- The development of relationships with support providers
- The improvement in client/server skills amongst their own staff

Support Needs Grow as Client/Server Goes Enterprisewide

Exhibit 2 shows results from a recent survey indicating increasing reliance on external support, as a result of adoption of client/server computing at an enterprise level. In contrast users adopting client/server, only at the departmental level, reported, on average, a lower level of requirement.

Exhibit 2

Change in User Support Need Following Transition to Client/Server



Enterprise-wide users, not surprisingly, were far more aware of the importance of support, and were better able to articulate the reasons why their support needs had changed; reasons given included:

- Greater dependence on the new systems
- The need for new skill sets
- Staffing increases
- Greater complexity of client/server applications

These comments contrast sharply with the reasons given by organisations who had only implemented departmental client/server systems. Their comments included:

- "Client/server systems are more robust"
- "The cost of supporting client/server is certainly less"
- "The department planned it that way"

Vendor Preferences for Client/Server Support

User opinion, as reflected in INPUT's recent survey, indicated that the majority of users saw the transition to client/server as an opportunity to escape vendor lock-in, and (in the words of one respondent) "welcomed the ability to switch between service suppliers if necessary".

Previous INPUT research has indicated, however, that about one third of the market prefers to use just one organisation for support, once client/server systems have been implemented.

Evidently, once the transition to client/server has been made, a significant proportion of organisations appreciate the difficulties of managing multiple supplier relationships in a highly distributed computing environment. In consequence they favour utilising one vendor to overcome this issue.

Additionally, several respondents expressed concern about the ability of their internal IS groups to provide adequate support for client/server computing, and considered the use of external client/server expertise to be a vital requirement.

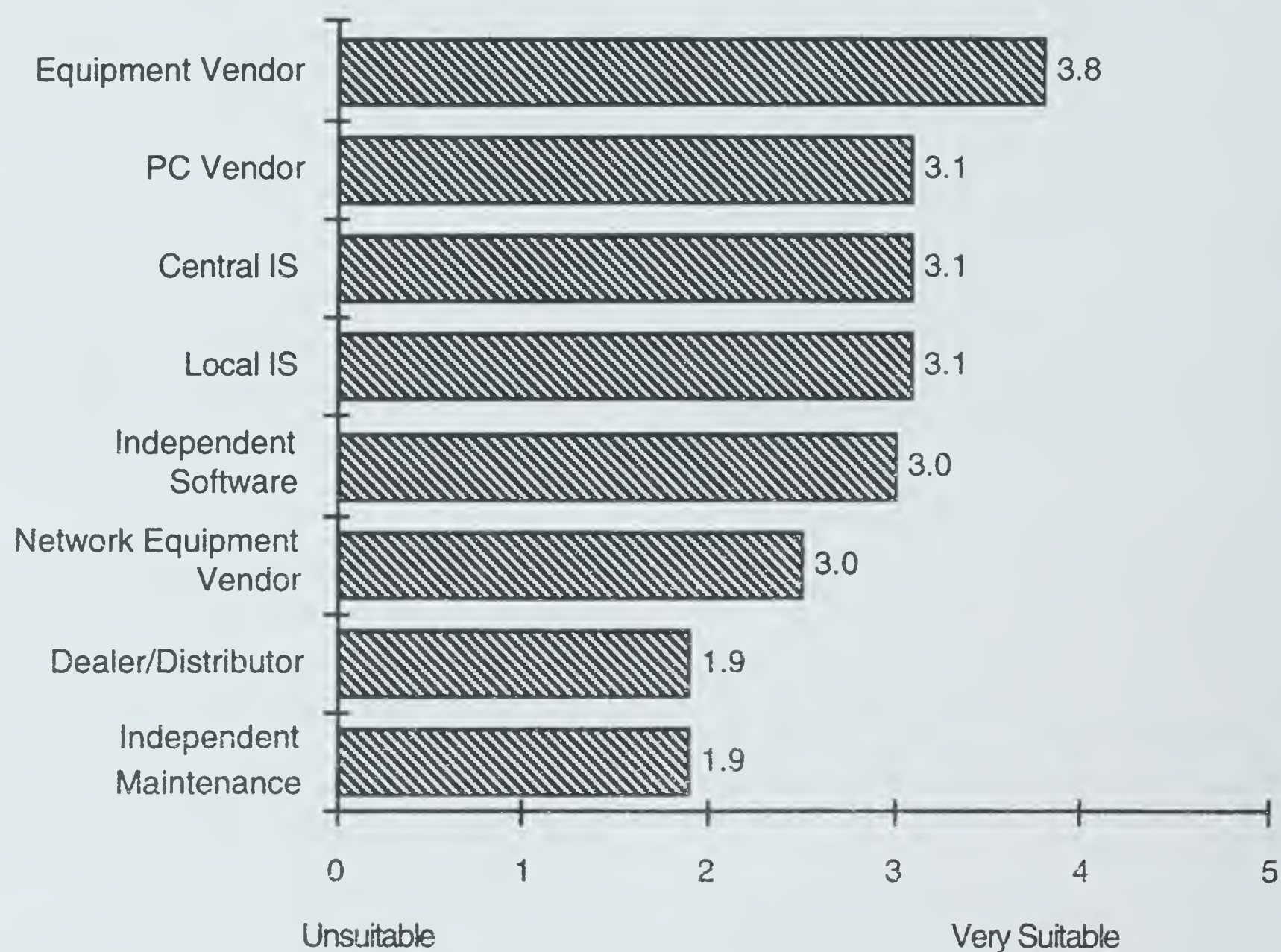
In client/server environments, the issue appears to be less whether to use external vendors for support, but how to select the best firms to support the environment effectively.

Exhibit 3 shows user's expressed preference for different categories of client/server computing support.

The only vendor grouping to obtain a strong rating was equipment vendors; indicating the need perhaps for stronger client/server marketing messages to be conveyed by other types of vendor.

Exhibit 3

Suitability of Suppliers of Client/Server Support



Source: INPUT

This Research Bulletin is issued as part of INPUT's Software Product Support Programme—Europe. If you have questions or comments on this bulletin, please call your local INPUT organisation or Peter Lines at INPUT, 17 Hill Street, London, W1X 7FB, UK, +44 (0) 71 493 9335.